Beloved Labours in Pink

By

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Abstract

Beloved Labours in Pink, a praxis paper, is a form of colour study. It constitutes a critical look at how the cultural associations of the colour pink inform my studio work and its concern with my gender and body as an artist, domestic rituals as personal performances, and the recognition of labour within the space of the home. My aim is to provide a space with which to investigate how pink is a politically charged colour. To do this, I will be analyzing the role of pink in relation to colour theory, popular culture, gender studies, theories of aesthetics, and institutions of power.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

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Introduction: Beloved Pink

During the second year of my Masters of Applied Arts degree, I decided to create a body of work using one and *only one* particular colour: pink. Through this colour I have examined the body, subjectivity, gender, and notions of home. *Beloved Labours in Pink* has led me to explore domestic rituals as personal performances and the acknowledgment of necessary labour in the home.

My colour palette has always been very selective. In the past, I have used images from pop culture that include fashion magazines and elements of found objects from my surroundings as well as second-hand and dollar stores. Due to the origins of these sources, my palette consisted of bright and bold colours: cadmium yellow, cadmium red, cobalt blue, neon yellow, acidic turquoise, and, finally, pink.

I decided to eliminate the other colours in my palette in order to focus my attention on pink. As my visual work has evolved, my research and writing has also been informed by this colour study. My research includes the study of colour theory, visual perception, and cultural readings on pink. Some of these readings include Karl Schawelka's interpretations of pink within biology, Judith Butler's examination on gender, and Gaston Bachelard's poetic interpretation of home. To contextualize my practice, I look to contemporary artists JeongMee Yoon and Portia Munson, both of whom have also examined the colour pink in their work. Since moving away from the language of

painting, I investigate feminist artists such as Janine Antoni, Carolee Schneemann, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles as a means to position myself within the discourses of performance and installation art.

I consider this thesis paper to be part of my process of making as a visual artist. During the time that I was working on *Beloved Labours in Pink*, I was actively working in my studio. By simultaneously writing, reading, researching, and making, I was able to further understand the ideas that have informed my process of making. While writing is always challenging and painful for me, I have come to realize the importance of articulating my ideas in written form and developing a critical distance from my work in a different way than critiques or artist talks. By using a less formal voice in this paper, my objective is to create an academic paper that allows for personal reflections.

This self-reflexive process, in combination with my dedication to the colour pink within this thesis project (both visual and written) has led me to push beyond an image-based practice towards a political, critical, conceptual, and material based art practice. As I look back at where this journey has taken me, I realize that the most rewarding discoveries have come from a place within myself. I have begun to understand how I operate as a maker. How does a sexed, gendered, and "pink" body engage in the world of making? This is a question that I wish to consider.

Chapter 1: Examination of Gender

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (301)

Within my artistic practice, I have been using the colour pink as a means to amplify my work's association with femininity. In the past, I used the colour without questioning its gendered associations. Over the past century, pink has become a gendered colour through numerous associations. For example, pink is related to femininity through the labelling of infants (pink is for girls and blue is for boys). Pink is associated with female genitalia in pornography ("pink parts") (Schawelka, *Showing Pink* 44). Pink is used in the home to infantilize or feminize a space. Pink is used as a marketing tactic to attract female consumers (by offering pink electronics and even tools). And pink was used to label homosexual men in Nazi concentration camps because they were not seen as "real" men (Haerebele qtd. in "Pink").

The concept of gender within Queer Theory and Feminist Studies has been debated over the last three decades. There has been an urgent need to re-examine a concept that was largely understood to be a biological or innate characteristic of human beings. In *Gender Trouble*, a prominent contribution to the gender debate in the last twenty years, Judith Butler explains:

> Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to

> have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. (8)

Butler goes on to point out that if gender is a social construction, which is connected to a sexed body, then the concept of gender and sex can never be the same because they are two fundamentally different characteristics (9). As a self-proclaimed feminist, I am constantly questioning how both my sex and gender influence my artistic practice in its making and reading. As my thesis research has developed over the past two years, I have come to realize that my chosen gender performance plays a significant role in my practice. Butler argues that sex and gender are not fixed and static characteristics of the self. They are cultural constructs that are closely tied to hetero-normativity. Categories such as "woman" and "man" do not allow us to freely appreciate the concept of gender as something more fluid (Butler 9).

In his book, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault writes:

> [...] to reduce all of sex to its reproductive function, its heterosexual adult form, and its matrimonial legitimacy fails to take into account the manifold objectives aimed for, the manifold means employed in the different sexual politics concerned with the two sexes, the different age groups and social classes. (103)

Foucault encourages the re-examination of the sexes and the need to look past reproduction. But he also reaffirms that our society can be reduced to two

genders and does not offer an alternative reading. Feminist writer Adrienne Rich challenged the idea of heterosexuality (that category of sexuality that is rooted in a binary system) in her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." She argues that "institutions" such as "patriarchal motherhood, economic exploration, the nuclear family, and compulsory heterosexuality" have "controlled women" and "are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media imagery, and efforts of censorship" (11). Through her research in feminist writings, Rich observes a lack of realistic "lesbian existence as a source of knowledge and power available to women" as well as a lack of authors dealing with "the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance" (13). She claims that in none of the sources alluded to in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" is the question ever raised as to whether women would choose heterosexual coupling and marriage; heterosexuality is presumed to be the "sexual preference" of "most women" either implicitly or explicitly" (13). With her essay, Rich aimed to "challenge the scholarly feminist literature [...] and to distort the experience of heterosexual woman" (11). While I associate with a feminine gender and am comfortable with my heterosexuality, I want to be clear that I do not consider heterosexuality a norm. And I do not agree that sexed bodies must assume a gender identity mirroring their sex. Because I consider my thesis body of work to be self-reflexive, I do not want to ignore the role that my own identity plays in my visual work.

If we focus on gender and not sex and we assume that our gender is a socially constructed concept, then we must begin to understand what gender we have "become" or "chosen" to "become." Is it even possible to state that we become a specific gender at a certain point in our life? Do I become a woman by being part of a society? Or is it more an evolutionary process involving time *and* development? Butler herself questions whether this "construction" of gender is a matter of choice. She critiques Simone de Beauvoir's declaration that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir qtd. in Butler 11) because it exemplifies the view that "a cultural compulsion to become one" is still present (11). We may not be born into a specific gender, but our cultural upbringing will determine what gender we may desire to become. This desire to construct a gender that mirrors our sex is yet another example of how hetero-normativity works.

An alternative perspective of gender is the concept of performing one's gender. Instead of agreeing that I have constructed and *become* a gender, I have chosen to look at my gender identity as performance. For example, in a 1993 interview with *Radical Philosophy*, Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal describe Butler's book *Gender Trouble* as appealing to many people because she reframed gender as a space of "improvisational theatre, a space where different identities can be more or less adopted and explored at free will" (Osborne and Segal). If I consider my gender to be a space that I can choose to occupy as well as shift and change whenever I choose to, then many possibilities open up in terms of how I may wish to identify myself. Within the

decision to explore these possibilities, how then do I decide upon a gender? What occurs when I choose to perform a certain way? What happens if I perform a gender that mirrors my sexed body? It is important to be aware that performing gender is not related to spectacle. This performance is not a form of costume. Rather, it is a way to examine one's gendered identity.

Why do I choose to present my body in a specific way and in a way that further labels me as female? The way that I have chosen to perform my gender and present my body is integral to who I am. I do not feel secure and confident in other gender identities. I am confident in *my identity*, confident in *my body*, and confident in *my performance*. This confidence has given me a sense of power. And this power that I speak of is not a power over someone else's body: it is a power over my own body.

This last year of research has resulted in this self-discovery. I have come to look inside myself for further understanding and questioning. The acknowledgement of my gender along with my body has presented me with a space for a deeper understanding of my artistic practice. My gender and sex play an important role in my work and the way that it is created. I have always felt a connection to feminism and the work of feminist artists and thinkers. When I first began to make work, I expressed concepts of desire and love as a young woman experiencing them for the first time. This exploration of my sexuality was how I realized that my work fit within a feminist critique. I did not understand how personal my work was at the time.

Writers such as Butler and Rich have helped me further understand research that is occurring within Gender Studies. As a young female feminist, I recognize and honour generations of feminists before me who, through their political activism, writing, and art making, have made a difference for my generation and future generations of all sexes. Not only is it important for me to acknowledge my feminist perspective, it is important for me to continue to contribute to the discourse of feminism. My position as a feminist is one that is contemporary; I recognize the many choices that I have been given and am aware that the roles I have chosen to take on are valuable. It is essential for me to claim power over my body and to choose to present my body in a certain way for myself.

My use of the colour pink within a feminist frame is political. One would assume that because I believe in the equality of the sexes, I would prefer to use a neutral colour instead of one that has been labelled "feminine." This neutrality would, however, limit the reading of my work. Since the gender of the artist is often considered when viewing a work, I further encourage this gendered reading in my intentional use of the colour pink. I am interested in the emotions that this colour evokes. These emotions are integral to my concept of "home."

Chapter 2: Home: A Concept

"Is it simply a curious anachronism, this desire for tradition, or is it a reflection of a deeper dissatisfaction with the surroundings that our modern world has created? What are we missing that we look so hard for in the past?"

Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (13)

Home means something different to everyone. I consider home to be more than the actual physical spaces that we inhabit. A house refers to a space composed of architectural elements. A home is more complex, less tangible, and more poetic. Home is a memory, a space within our psyche that we retreat to for safety or comfort. Indeed, home is something that we create through a series of events, actions, and rituals. Domestic activities such as baking, cooking, and craft making are my way of creating a home. One cannot help but feel at home on a cold November night in the warmth of one's dwelling, away from the bustle of the city streets, where a stew is cooking on the stove, and the smell of fresh baked bread emanates from the oven. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard has greatly informed the way that I define home. He considers the home to be more than an architectural construction. He defines it as a space where we naturally submerge into thoughts and dreams (5).

Figure 1. Jennifer Schuler, *Home (a memory)*, acrylic, varnish, graphite, pencil on paper, 2008

How does my interest in the colour pink relate to this feeling of home? In early 2008, I began working on a series of drawings and collages that incorporated images of the home and the domestic into my work. These drawings were created by visiting my past through memory. I began daydreaming about my childhood and remembering how my parents created a loving, safe, and supportive home for me and my two sisters. The most vivid memory that I can recall is feeling safe and warm. In *Home (a memory)* (fig. 1) (which is part of a series of drawings), the home that I grew up in emerges

from the surface of the page by being engulfed or surrounded by oval shapes of pale and deep pinks and gold. The home is defined by its contours and surroundings. The coloured shapes are a place for the feelings of home to exist on the page and in the drawing. I see these shapes as a depiction of love. And I have used colour and simple shapes as a means to illustrate this enormous emotion. A loving home would be a home where one feels safe and comfortable.

"The word 'comfortable' did not originally refer to enjoyment or contentment. Its Latin root was *confortare*—to strengthen or console" (Rybczynski 20). I would argue that to feel comfortable in one's dwelling is the most important element of a home. However, in the past, the notion of comfort was merely the description of a state of acceptability: as "one spoke of a bed of comfortable width, although not yet of a comfortable bed [...] eventually 'comfortable' acquired its sense of physical well-being and enjoyment" (Rybczynski 20). When I remember how it felt to be comfortable at home as a child, the strongest memories are not how comfortable my bed was or how soft our couch was. My memories of comfort are more associated to the dynamics of our home in terms of the feeling of our home. This comfort relates to what I earlier described as the creation of home though domestic activities.

The concept of comfort relates to the home as well as the body. To feel comfortable and at home in one's skin is, for me, connected to a sense of

power and confidence. It is important for me to feel comfortable in my own body. But it is not enough to feel at home in a physical body. It is also necessary to feel at home in the cerebral body. It has taken me many years to come to the point where I can now say I am at home in my body. Acknowledging that I feel at home in this way has influenced my making and my confidence in making.

This confidence in making was not always present in me. During the process of evolution and experimentation over the last two years, I struggled with the idea of evoking the sense of domestic comfort through my work. Because I have always worked with images, I attempted to *illustrate* the notion of comfort within the home. As a result of rigourous critiques from my peers, I have realized that a successful work should *evoke* emotions and memories rather than merely illustrate them.

Figure 2. Jennifer Schuler, *I'm Gonna Love You Soft and Sweet*, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 2004

My earlier work consisted of photo-realist pop paintings. I was comfortable working with images. The images that I used were derived from collections of vintage catalogues, fashion photographs, diagrams, comic books, and music. I combined these graphic images with loose mark making, graffiti, collage, transfers, glitter, and stencilling. While still using the same visual language and types of images, I also worked in embroidery, textile printing, animation, drawing, and assemblage. My process involved working

in a realistic yet slick style that was driven by my interest in creating seductive and lush compositions. This is illustrated by my painting *I'm Gonna Love you Soft and Sweet* (fig. 2). My objective was to create relationships between the images on the picture plane. The reading that I anticipated from my viewer was a sense of seduction (in the way that I created my images). I also wanted my viewer to be involved in a process of creating narratives or conclusions from my compositions (in the way that I combined my collection of images).

My objectives have since shifted. My desires now lie in what the work can evoke. This shift in thinking not only came through my struggle to speak about my concepts of home, but also through an exploration of materials themselves. I realize now that my past two-dimensional works were, in fact, limiting the *experience* of viewing the work. As Marvin Carlson explains in his book *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, installation work has the capacity to "move off [the] surface to claim significant physical and psychic space in the external world" (101).

My first attempt at sculpture occurred while experimenting in the studio in the fall of 2007. The exploration began with a painting that I made (fig. 3) on a found object—a pallet—that was read by my peers as a traditionally "male" object because of its roughness and reference to the factory. I understand that male artists have been a dominant force in the field of painting for many centuries. As a female feminist painter, I wanted to critique this particular history by shifting from a "male" canvas onto an even more "masculine" material: the pallet. The materiality of the wood, however,

was far more interesting to me than this critique and the preciousness of my painting. My initial manipulation of the pallet involved my desire to take it apart. With a crow bar, hammer, and the force of my body, I split each piece of wood from its original assemblage. The moment my painting existed in strips of wood, I realized I could break free from painting. With these strips, I began creating a roughly constructed sculpture of a house (fig. 4). The exterior walls were painted white to evoke a whitewashed country home. The interior walls were left unfinished since I still wanted to show the fragmented painting. I now consider this house to be a sketch for a future sculptural work. It is with this work that I discovered a new interest in sculpture.

Figure 3. Jennifer Schuler, *Professional*, acrylic paint, plaster, found objects on found material, 2007

Figure 4. Jennifer Schuler, *Sketch for a Home*, found wood, acrylic paint, nails, glue, clamps, 2007

Figure 5. Jennifer Schuler, *Home*, wood, Plexiglas, spray paint, found materials, 2008

In the spring of 2008, I began creating *Home* (fig. 5) in the form of a miniature sculpture of a suburban home. Even at an early age, I was fascinated with small creatures, objects, and worlds. I often imagined what it would be like to be as small as a fairy. I would daydream about living inside of my dollhouse. In her book, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart explains that the child "continually enters [into the world of the miniature] as a metaphor perhaps [...] because the child is in some physical sense a miniature of the adult" (45). Bachelard states that "[...] imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers" (149). In a sense, then, my work attempts to illustrate an element from the world of my

imagination by creating a miniature sculpture of a home. Stewart further describes how the miniature "always calls attention" to the entirety of the object as a depiction of the object and a "situation within situation, world within world" (44-45). This calling to attention could also be related to how, by making a miniature, one can highlight the "real" world in that comparisons can be made between the "real" object and the miniature "copy."

I wanted *Home* to possess a bizarre and distorted presence in combination with realistic attributes of a house. In the past, I was familiar with creating "perfect," "lush," and "beautiful" images. But this time, I was looking for a different vocabulary with which to work. I distorted the home by elongating the structure and placing my windows in "unnatural" locations. The effect was the appearance of multiple and split-levels that disrupted the traditional viewing space. The glowing pink of the windows were my way of creating a sense of human activity that we as outsiders observe. I intentionally left some of the areas empty and hoped that my viewer would begin creating their own narrative within this work.

The process of creating an object and image that would finally take a three-dimensional form was labour intensive, challenging, exhausting, and rewarding. Working in sculpture presented me with a different vocabulary of making than my past work. *Home* made me consider my materials and realize my potential beyond painting and drawing.

As I entered into the second year of the Masters of Applied Arts degree program, the risks that I had taken in my first year lead me to new areas of inquiry. I decided that I would continue to push my work even further. It was after a public presentation in the fall of 2008 along with feedback from some of the faculty at Emily Carr University and my advisor that I decided to eliminate all other colours in my work and stick to the use of pink. I began looking into how this colour is perceived in different contexts.

Chapter 3: The Complexities of a Colour

Colour as a phenomena is "a primary sensory experience for most of us" (Gage 1). Yet it is far more complex in relation to the fields of science, physics, and physiology. It has been discovered that, while humans recognize colour, it is not identifiable by most other species on earth.[1] When first understanding the physics of colour, one must understand its relationship to light. According to Aristotle, the physicality of objects, light, reflection, and distance all play a role in how colour is made visible. In *Colour: A Study of its Position in the Art Theory of the Quattro and Cinquecento*, Jonas Gravel describes part of Aristotle's theory:

> The perceived colour is defined as an immaterial potentiality in a transparent medium, actualized by light. [...] it may either be caused by reflection of light from diluted substances in unlimited bodies, particular from humidity in the air, or originate

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[1] Only humans, old world apes, and primates have the ability to identify colour through trichromatic colour perception (Schawelka, *Showing Pink* 42). Three channels for colour vision categorized in black-white, red-green, and blue-yellow are present in the visual receptors of the visual system and make the ability to see colour possible (Matthen120). Dichromatic colour perception is common in other species and mammals, which does not give them the ability to see and identify colour (Schawelka, *Showing Pink* 2).

> in limited bodies, viewed through the medium, i.e. the air. Since reflection affects light, the perceived colours are in both cases changed by distance. (14)

A consideration of elements such as light and distance has helped me further understand human visual perception. In my classical training in visual arts as a college student, in order to better use colours within my work, I was taught to identify warm and cool qualities of colour by using the colour wheel[2]. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the chemical composition of pink as a "yellowish or greenish-yellow lake pigment (a pigment of reddish hue) made by combining a vegetable colouring matter with a white base, such as a metallic oxide." Due to this chemical composition of warm tones, we can begin reading pink primarily as a warm colour. While there are many different tones of pink, with some being cooler than others, I am drawn to the warm tones of pink because of their relationship to the pinks found in nature and the body. I also read warm pinks as inviting, pleasant, and comforting. Cool colours, such as phthalo blue or cobalt green, evoke in me different sensory

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[2] In 1813, Charles Hayter presented the "warm-and-cold 'painter's compass' [...] in his *Introduction to Perspective*, a handbook for amateur artists" (Gage 23). In his book, *Color and Meaning; Art, Science, and Symbolism*, John Gage states that Hayter "was probably the first systematic theorist to introduce of the notion of hot-cold co-ordinates" (23).

reactions, such as tranquillity, bleakness, loneliness, and even despair. The way that we perceive colours as warm or cool could relate to how we associate colour within nature. For example, it has been claimed by linguist professor Anna Wierzbicka, whose works include cognitive science, that we subconsciously associate warm colour with the sun and fire (Wierzbicka qtd. in Gage 23).

Pink in Nature

Pink is visible in vegetation, animals, plants, and other living organisms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* relates the colour pink to the carnation flower. In her book, *The Visual Nature of Colour*, Patricia Sloan writes that French and English associate the colour rose[3] with the pink coloured roses, when roses in nature also appear as red, yellow or white (6).

Karl Schawelka, a professor at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany, has written numerous books on colour perception. He has suggested that the rose in fine art often appears as an erotic element (*Showing Pink* 43). He also associates the rose and the colour pink with "youth, femininity, and even virginity and innocence" (*Showing Pink* 43). I do not agree entirely with this simplistic reading of the colour pink and women, yet classical paintings have presented the rose and the colour pink in this way.

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[3] Rose being another word to describe the colour pink.

Figure 6. Agnolo Bronzino, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid,* 1545, image courtesy of The National Gallery of London

In Agnolo Bronzino's extremely erotic painting, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (fig. 6), Cupid kisses and touches his mother, Venus. The glow of their pink blush is very visible. It contrasts strongly with their pale skin and intensifies their passionate act. A young boy also presents Venus with a collection of pink roses. I would argue that the colour pink amplifies the erotic subject matter. A less passionate colour for the roses, such as yellow or white, would not have been as noticeable.

Pink in Biology and the Human Body

Pink is present on the inside of the human body in tissues, muscles, and organs. Indeed, some humans have pink complexions as well. Schawelka claims that the colour pink is associated with the eroticization of the body and, specifically, women's bodies. He describes that when a "young, attractive woman" is aware of male sexual advances, she starts to blush (*Showing Pink* 43). While he claims that both (implying there are two) genders blush and that both genders might blush for reasons other than sexual, for him the "phenomenon" of blushing is most commonly noticed when a young woman is blushing once "they are the focus of sexual desire"(*Showing Pink* 46).

Blushing is also related to embarrassment and shame. Since Schawelka focuses only on the act of blushing only in women, does this imply that women should be embarrassed by sexual advances? How does shame and sex contribute to the objectified reading of women (especially young women)? What occurs when a woman is the focus of the male gaze when her participation is active and not passive?

Figure 7. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing*, oil on canvas, 1767, image courtesy of the Trustee of the Wallace Collection, London

The Swing by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (fig. 7) is useful to examine here. The woman represented appears to be blushing but she is also active in the presence of a man's sexual advances. The scene depicted in the painting involves this woman exposing herself to a young man through the playful act of swinging. Jennifer Milam explains that in eighteenth century France, "swinging permitted occasions of sexual disorder where uninhibited positions

revealed the body and spectators glimpsed views that were usually hidden from sight" (545). The act of swinging allowed members of the elite to express themselves physically, whereas such gestures would "elsewhere be strictly controlled by the court etiquette" (Milam 545). Swinging and other outdoors games were also popular during this period because the swinger "received the physical benefits of exercise without an unbecoming expression of effort, having the 'double effects' of being both active and passive at once" (Milam 548).

The scene in this painting is overtly sexual because the young woman on the swing kicks off one of her shoes, perhaps to startle the male voyeur in the bush or to lift her dress even higher, thereby exposing more of her flesh to him. The role of the colour pink in the blush of the two figures flags this scene as an erotic one. There are other sexual symbols included in the work. As Milam explains:

> The male hat [...] was commonly used in rococo art to hide an erection. Here, the hat is off, indicating male abandoned to excitement and passion. The opening of the cap conveniently catches up some of the rose bush (a conventional symbol of female sexuality) and with this fitting of parts quite literally makes a visual pun on sexual engagement. [The act of swinging] alludes to the fickleness of women in the emblematic tradition, but also with its rhythmic motion, to the act of lovemaking. More specific symbols—a tossed shoe (female abandon to passion), an

> unshod foot (lost virginity), an eager lap dog (impatient desire), a statue of Cupid who silences with one hand and pulls arrows from quiver with another (love at work), and a hat that caps a budding bush (sexual engagement)—all collude with the primary emblem of the swing to create an encoded, erotic scene.(549)

Fragonard painted *The Swing* as a commission intended for a private patron's "intimate retreat [...] that would encourage a similar degree of sexual licence" (Milam 549). Although every detail of this painting is a construction, I am intrigued by the female character's empowered pose and active presence. The colour pink in this work can be seen to embody a female sexuality that is active and empowered.

Schawelka continues to focus on the sexuality of women in his text when he refers to women's genitals as "pink parts." "Engorged pink labia play an important role in pornographic contexts. The expression, 'showing pink' is commonly found on the Internet with reference to nude photographs of female models exposing their genitals" (Schawelka, *Showing Pink* 44). Since pink is the only colour in my work, references such as these form part of the reading of the work. However, my aim in using pink is similar to feminist artists such as Judy Chicago, Hannah Wilkes, and Ghada Amer and their usage of female genital imagery to celebrate and unite women as well as promote empowerment by embracing female sexuality. In using pink, which already has an association with sexuality, I am referencing sex and the body without overtly using genital imagery in my work.

Pink as a Gendered Colour

In western culture, the colour pink is often gender-coded. Through consumerism and marketing strategies, pink has been constructed as a female colour. For example, when purchasing clothing for small infants, most people have noticed that our society is trained to categorize infants by gender through colour.

On 28 January 2009, *The Current* on CBC Radio aired a special on the colour pink. In an interview, Sue Palmer, Educational Consultant and author of *Toxic Childhood*, suggested that the marketing tactic to push pink on little girls has been occurring for quite some time now. Pink toys in the form of Barbie, Cindy, and My Little Pony have been around for decades. However, according to Palmer, it has only been since the 1990s as "TV stations and commercial stations for children" increased in numbers that the bombardment and pressuring have started affecting the choices and interests of children, specifically girls, in relation to pink (Palmer qtd. in "Pink").

Contemporary artist JeongMee Yoon was inspired by her five-year old daughter SeoWoo's obsession with the colour pink. In 2005, Yoon began creating a portrait (fig. 8) by "assembling all of her daughter's pink possessions—stuffed animals, dolls, plastic toys, books, clothes, jewellery, makeup, and school supplies—into an orderly display. SeoWoo's bedroom was transformed into a pink kingdom for a child queen" (Yochelson). Yoon then photographed the perfect arrangement with her daughter also inserted

amongst the “pink things” (Yoon). Since then, Yoon has continued to make similar portraits of other girls (fig. 9). This project is ongoing and consists of close to thirty portraits to date. For Yoon, this work

> [...] explores the trends in cultural preference and the difference in the tastes of children (and their parents) from diverse cultures, ethnic groups as well as gender socialization and identity. The work also raises other issues, such as the relationship between gender and consumerism, urbanization, the globalization of consumerism, and the new capitalism. (Yoon)

Figure 8. JeongMee Yoon, *The Pink Project: SeoWoo and Her Pink Things*, light jet print, 2006, image courtesy of the artist

Figure 9. JeongMee Yoon, *The Pink Project: Jiwoo and Her Pink Things*, light jet print, 2007, image courtesy of the artist

My intrigue with Yoon's portraits is with how they capture a shocking image of childhood consumerism and obsession. Because the girls have been asked to sit with their pink belongings, they appear somewhat artificial and plastic themselves. Both of the girls are quite young and physically small. Nevertheless, their pink collections of toys and objects are so large. In many of the photographs, the girls are even difficult to see. Dressed primarily in pink, the girls become a part of the obsessive tableau. I see the obsession with the colour pink in this work not only as a problem among young girls, but a problem having much to do with parents who purchase the objects and the advertising market that is gendering how children develop, play, and learn through the use of colour. The problem I am referring to here has to do with the lack of choice that parents and children are now dealing with in terms of girls' toys not readily available in other colours.

It is important to point out that the gendering of pink is a relatively recent phenomenon. In 1914, it was suggested by *The Sunday Sentinel* and in 1918 by *Ladies Home Journal* (Berg) that boys wear clothing in the colour pink and that girls wear clothing in blue in the United States[4]. Pink was deemed to be more suitable for boys because it was considered to be a stronger colour in its derivation from red, a colour that still today is associated with

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[4] My family has evidence that this trend was followed; my mother recently found a crocheted hat that my American grandfather wore when he was a baby in the 1920s (fig. 10). To our surprise, it is pink.

power and strength. It is unclear when exactly blue became popular for boys and pink for girls. Blue “could have gained a masculine association because it was used for school uniforms in the seventeenth century [...] in part because blue dyes, relatively easy to produce, were inexpensive. Blue has also been used extensively in many military uniforms” (Berg), perhaps attributing to its current association with masculinity.

Figure 10. A pink hat my grandfather wore in the 1920s

Pink and Taste

During the 1950s, pink was a very popular colour for appliances, decorative styles, automobiles, and even radios. Penny Sparke states that the colour pink was "linked with the idea of female childhood" (196). She further explains that gender guidelines, enforced by parents with regards to their young children, were common.

Since pink was, at this point in time, already associated with femininity, "the use of pink in the home emphasized the essential femininity of girls and women" (Sparke 196). However, as this feminine taste and aesthetic was being popularized for women and girls, it was also criticized. Sparke describes how

> Pink and gold subsequently became linked with what was seen as the vulgarity of 1950s consumerism. [...] Within early modernism the antagonism of design reformers and protagonists to women's tastes had been both direct, and overt, in the years after 1945 the attacks on "bad taste" and feminine culture were more oblique, more complex, and a result, more subtly damaging. [...] While gender was seldom, if ever, overtly linked to the problems of mass culture and popular taste it was implied, nonetheless, in the adoption of the masculinist modernist canon. (198, 204-205)

Modernist aesthetics within the home have influenced the reception and acceptability of feminine taste and the colour pink up to the present. Throughout my research following current trends in decoration, I have noticed strong negative reactions to the use of pink within the home. For example, when fashion designer Betsy Johnson decided to sell her New York condominium, which was primarily decorated in pink, the Internet community took notice. While the reviews were mixed, many decorating and blogging websites reacted with headings and comments such as "Betsy Johnson Barbie Home: Eeew!," "House of Pepto-Bismol" (Kpriss), "Lovely place! Too bad about the colour" (Michael), "Betsy Johnson's Penthouse: That's Rather Hideous?" and "Most hideous apartment in Manhattan" (*Curbed*). When the use of pink is encouraged within the home, it is mostly within strict guidelines and rules (such as its sole use as an accent colour). "Too much and you could get a bit of a headache" (Stein)[5]. Besides the use of pink in girls' bedrooms (further infantilizing the colour), it seems that today there continues to be a limit to how much pink our society accepts within the home.

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[5] At one point during this project, I was looking to purchase a can of pink house paint. My intent was to have a custom shade of pink mixed at a hardware store. However, after discovering a shelf of rejected paint cans, I noticed that they all where, in fact, shades of pink. To my advantage, I discovered an array of pink paint shades available at extremely reduced prices.

Pink: Regarded as an Embarrassing Colour

"I had always loved pink and hoarded pink. But when I was in art school, I wanted to figure out a way to make it acceptable. To like and have around a lot of this colour, which was considered innocent and passive, and for a girl."

Portia Munson, *Reclaiming the Body: Feminist Art in America* (Blackwood)

Portia Munson's ongoing work, *Pink Project* (fig. 11), consists of a collection of objects that she began during her undergraduate studies in the 1970s at Cooper Union with instructors Martha Rosler, Barbara Kruger, Vito Acconci, and Hans Haacke. When discussing this work, Munson claims that "working with colour was not [accepted]—people didn't do that. Art was much more cold. It was a different kind of time. So for me, having a lot of pink around was almost a way of being rebellious. [...] It was a challenge—how can I make work that is political and also pretty?" (Liese). With my use of pink, I argue that this tension still exists. In the past, I would worry constantly about how my work was perceived because of my use of pink. Now that I fully embrace the colour, I do not feel insecure anymore, even though I know that the negative reading of pink still occurs. As Schawelka states, "Pink is so often viewed as vulgar or kitschy and is one of the most vehemently rejected colours of all. [...] Pink can easily be seen as a violation of taboo, an undesirable affront" (*Showing Pink* 48). Unfortunately, these readings have resulted in pink being, in some instances, considered as an embarrassing colour.

Figure 11. Portia Munson, *Pink Project: Table*, 1994, image courtesy of the artist

From films such as *Clueless* (1995), *Legally Blonde* 1 and 2 (2001 and 2003), *Mean Girls* (2004), to *Confessions of Shopaholic* (2009), the colour pink is used as a means to depict characters as less intelligent, immature, artificial, overtly sexualized, and only having interest in fashion, make-up, and shopping. These characteristics have nothing inherently in common with the colour; however, Hollywood cinema perpetuates such associations, which further stereotypes pink as less serious.

Over the last several years, pink has been used as a way to target specific products to women. In her article "La Vie en Rose," Vicky Frost explains that "it is now possible for women to experience their entire day in pink." Some examples of pink objects that she references are "pink yoga mats

and weights, pink wiper wings, a pink George Foreman Grill, pink hair straightener, pink cell phones and laptops, pink tools, and even pink Taser guns" (Foster). While this strategy suggests that women are recognized as independent consumers, the pink objects do not offer anything different or even superior in comparison to non-pink objects. In the case of electronics, Foster explains how manufactures will sometimes improve or upgrade a product aimed at men while for women they simply offer it in another colour (Foster). Tools such as screwdrivers, hammers and pliers are now also available in pink. A strange psychological message is conveyed when objects such as these are marketed for women. As Foster explains, "these tools are clearly aimed at independent, capable women, but there is this suggestion that they need to constantly remind themselves of their femininity, even when they're hammering a nail" (Foster).

In the fashion and beauty industry, the colour pink is frequently used in advertisements, products, and especially magazine covers. Due to the usage of pink within these contexts, I argue that it is further stereotyped as a feminine colour by associating it with products for women and by using it to generate a specific interest in a market directed at women. Female consumers are either attracted to the new colour choice or refuse to buy into the classification of an object due to its colour (Foster).

Beyond marketing strategies, there are instances when pink, because of its feminine association, has been used to passively control individuals. In 2007, the sheriff of Mason Country in Texas, Clint Low, "put all inmates in

pink jumpsuits, he put them in pink shoes, pink underwear and pink socks. He painted cell walls pink and put in pink sheets and towels" (Barnett 4a). This decision had a direct impact on the inmates. The penitentiary had issues with multiple repeat offenders and, due to the sheriff's sexist strategies, they noticed a sixty-eight percent reduction in repeat offenders. Clint claims it is "not about trying to humiliate people. It's simply that with them not liking it, they're embarrassed by it, and they don't want to come back" (Barnett 4a). While the tactic was successful, presenting pink as feminine within an extremely male dominated environment further enforces the stereotype that pink is, in some instances, regarded as a shameful colour. Even more troubling, this example also reaffirms to men that being feminine is negative and embarrassing in western society.

Pink has also been part of "a general system of domination exerted by one group over another" (Foucault 92). According to Michel Foucault,

> [...] the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system [...] as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institution crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. [...] power is exercised from innumerable points. [...]

> Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective [...] there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. (92-95)

In order for the German Nazis to meet their perverse aims and objectives during the Second World War, extreme tactics were used. One involved the use of pink in the concentration camps. Erwin Haerebele explains that colour served as a form of classification and identification of "enemies." This classification was, as Haerebeld describes, [a form of] "very primitive prison management [...] to construct hierarchy even in their own man made hell in order to control better" (Haerebele). While Jews were identified by the colour yellow, the colour classification extended to include red for political prisoners, brown for gypsies, and pink for homosexuals. Haerebeld claims, "I think they thought pink was a feminine colour and since they could say that homosexuals were not 'real' men they assigned them the colour pink" (Haerebele qtd. in "Pink").

Why do I insist on using pink within my work despite these cultural associations? My intentions are not to further stereotype the colour, but rather to challenge and subvert any stereotypes. In my current work, I am primarily investigating domestic labour performed in the past and still somewhat today by women. This labour is not glamourous or even pleasant. It is, however, time consuming, physically demanding, and ongoing. I create tension in the work by examining this domestic labour and its use of pink, thereby subverting our preconceived notions of the colour. While I am embracing

pink, it is not always bold or loud in my work. Oftentimes my work balances the pink with white. My intention is to deliberately use colour in my work to allow a space for alternative readings of the work, whether it is a culturally charged reading or a bodily response to the colour pink.

Chapter 4: Labour, the Body, and the Maker

The biological aspects of pink have informed my interest to further understand my body as a maker (which includes the mind as well as the physical body). This has, in turn, led me to consider the discourse of psychoanalysis. I believe that Sigmund Freud's discoveries were influential and groundbreaking. As a feminist, however, I appreciate Joan Riviere's use of Freud's theories to further examine women's psychological states. Her influential text "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929) examines specific cases with patients that illustrate how "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared by men" (128). The concept of masquerade within Riviere's essay relates to an extent with the earlier examination of gender in this thesis. I am interested in how psychoanalysis has helped further the understanding gender and gender identity.

In my initial inquiry of pink and the importance of my body in my art practice, I began thinking about the interior of the body. Since the colour pink is present on the inside of my body, I was intrigued with how this related to psychoanalytical readings of the bodily ego. As explained by Freud, the bodily ego "is itself the projection of a surface" (Freud qtd in Silverman 10). The surface could be read as the physical body. Since the erotic zones of the physical body are examined at great length in psychoanalytic theory, it is no surprise that the bodily ego is also related to these erotic zones. Freud's writing on "erotogenic zones" focuses on the notion of perversion: "In hysteria

these parts of the body and the neighbouring tracts of mucous membrane become the seat of new sensations and of changes in innervations" (Freud 35).

Figure 12. Jennifer Schuler, *Pink Self*, digital photograph, 2008

In *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*, Paul Schilder offers a different reading:

> The enormous psychological importance of all openings of the body is obvious since it is by these openings that we come in closest contact with the world. By them we ingest air, food, sex products; by them we eject urine, sex products, feces, and air.

> We have therefore distinguished points in the postural model of the body. These points are at the same time points of erotic importance. […] Individuals in whom a partial desire is increased will feel the particular point of the body, the particular erogenic zone belonging to the desire, in the center of the body-image. It is as if energy were amassed on these particular points. (124)

After pursuing this inquiry within my research, I decided to create a painting that was specifically informed by these theories. I began thinking about how I could capture the openings of my body as a representation of my self and my "pink ego." In order to capture the pink opening of my body, I began creating a series of digital photographs of the inside of my mouth (fig. 12). I chose the opening of my mouth because the photographs appeared as abstract images consisting of an array of pink tones. I was also fascinated with the notion of ingesting the world, as Schilder explained, through the mouth. Once I transferred one of these images into painting, I struggled with the desire to depict and emulate the photograph as best as I could. The objectivity of the painting became more prominent than the theory I was referencing. Perhaps the painting was referencing the theory too directly. I struggled to symbolize the theory instead of using the theory as a position through which to view the work. I did not end up completing this work and opted instead to draw.

Figure 13. Jennifer Schuler, *Untitled (Openings)*, pastel on frosted Mylar, 2009

I began exploring the mark in a series of drawings on frosted Mylar (fig. 13), a material that, for me, refers to a skin or membrane. This work is ongoing and I am currently creating an abstract image using oil pastel that references the image in the painting or the digital photographs but does not emulate them. While producing these drawings, I have become more aware of my body. I want the mark to be saturated in colour and pigment. The best way for me to obtain this is by pushing and drawing with my entire arm. Once the colour or pigments are at the level of saturation that I feel is sufficient, I begin to rub the mark. A rag with mineral spirits allows me to achieve a fluid consistency. I rub the drawing for quite awhile, constantly pushing and forcing my arm to make strong marks. As I am rubbing, I am immediately made aware

of my body. It does not take long for my arm to become sore. The muscles are tense and become tired. Occasionally, I stop and rest my arm, but not for long. The repetitive movement of rubbing becomes rhythmic and meditative. Because of the pain, I am never dislocated from my body or arm. At a certain point, I stop using a rag and begin rubbing with my palm and bare fingers. This movement heightens my bodily experience. My skin is in direct contact with the drawing and the materials. My skin, the thin layer of myself that covers my body, connects to the drawing on the Mylar. While Mylar is initially a smooth surface, it begins to feel rough as the drawing progresses.

I have now realized that my process of making has always involved my body. My work is created through the experience of touching, manipulating, cutting, tearing, pushing, pulling, pouring, stretching, hitting, and bending various materials and objects. In my past studio work, I was interested in creating a final object or image. I have slowly noticed that, while the final tangible "thing" is still important, I am more interested in how I am making these "things." The process of making is now acknowledged and made visible in the work.

The work titled *Traces of Labour* (fig. 15) is an example of how I am highlighting my physical actions in the work. After working in the studio for a few hours on the series of drawings on Mylar, I begin the process of ending my workday. This process involves washing my hands in the nearby sink. As I look down at my hands and the thick soap foaming through my fingers, I can

see that the suds are stained from my labour. The pink soapsuds are so compelling that I know I have to save them. I know I cannot let them disappear down the drain. I quickly go back into my studio space and look around to see how I can save these suds. I decide to place them on a sheet of watercolour paper. When I leave the studio shortly after, the suds are three-dimensional masses sitting on the sheet of paper. I know that once the soap has dissolved, something will be left behind. I return the next day to find that the suds have transformed into a drawing.

Figure 14. Jennifer Schuler, *Traces of Labour* (detail), pastel and soap on paper, 2009

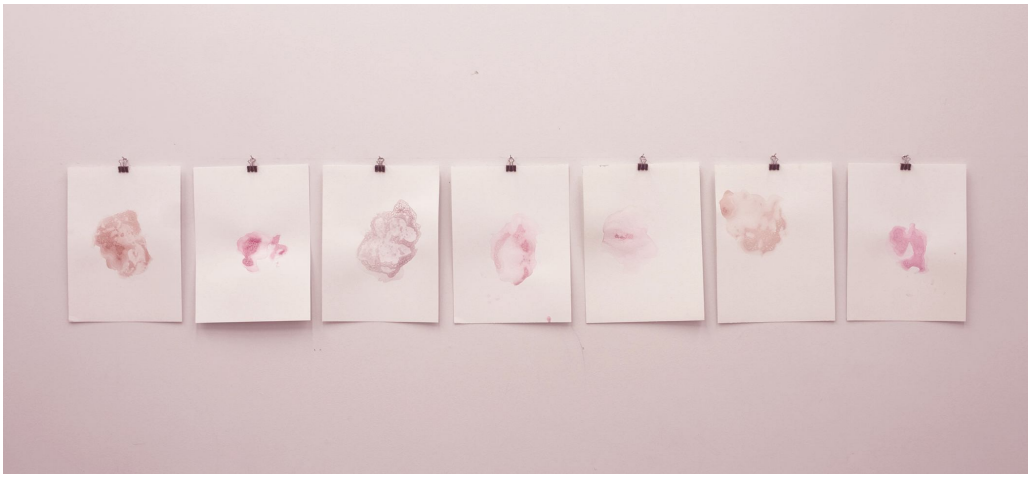

Figure 15. Jennifer Schuler, *Traces of Labour*, pastel and soap on paper, 2009

These drawings are direct traces of my labour in the studio. My process of using oil pastels with my bare hands is recorded by the simple act of washing my hands at the end of the day. The final drawing will be altered depending upon which shade of pink I used and how long I have worked. *Traces of Labour* is a work that will continue to exist for the length of my "pink phase." Since this initial experiment, I have made a drawing for each day of labour in the studio. Due to the motion of my hands and the varying intensity of the colour, each day of labour results in a different drawing. The simplicity in the gesture of washing away the "dirt" has now become a form of ritual, captured in a series of drawings.

Now that I have decided to keep a record or a trace of my labour in the studio, I have begun considering how I will communicate this process to my audience. Whether I hang this work in a straight line (fig. 15) or in a grid consisting of thirty, sixty, or ninety drawings, the element of time and

excessive labour will hopefully be visible to the viewer. If I present only one of the drawings, with an artist statement, a different reading will occur. My viewer might question my statement because the excess of labour will not be visible to her. However, by presenting only one drawing, I am asking my viewer to focus on the process rather than the volume of the work.

I used to be deeply concerned with emulating an image or creating the "perfect" composition in my paintings. To reduce, reduce, and reduce has been an extremely challenging but crucial process for me. I am looking at what all of my actions and materials signify and how I can create work that is more critical. By including my body within my process, I now ask how I see myself as a maker and a body in my practice and how my practice operates within the larger discourse of art itself. The physicality of my body is crucial to my artistic work. My body is made up of cells, tissues, muscles, bones, organs, and fluids. My body has a heart that pumps blood, lungs that breathe air, and muscles that flex and relax. My body has a weight and takes up volume in space. I cannot ignore that I am here on the earth in a physical from, asserting my right to take up my space in our society, to be visible, and to let my voice be heard.

In 1971, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, along with their students from the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, organized a collaborative, multidisciplinary feminist piece titled *Womanhouse* (Balducci 17). The objective of *Womanhouse* was to create "a space reserved for women" (18) in an abandoned house in California in order to "deconstruct

the myth of the white, middle-class housewife as a satisfied, fulfilled, domestic goddess" (17). When it opened to the public in the winter of 1972, *Womanhouse* was an extremely powerful work of art that included contributions by dozens of talented, intelligent, and strong young women. The initial construction of this work was just as valuable and empowering as the final installation. In "Revisiting Womanhouse: Welcome to the (Deconstructed) Doll House," Temma Balducci explains:

> [...] having been vandalized numerous times and already slated for demolition, the structure was in advanced state of disrepair [...]. The artists had to deal with basic maintenance issues such as installing lights and repairing windows. [In addition] they built walls and partitions, painted and wallpapered, and refinished floors. The renovation effort entailed a steep learning curve for the participating artists, as most, if not all, of the skills needed to complete these tasks were generally associated with men. Few of the women had ever worked with power tools or had everyday dealings with hardware store personnel. (18)

There is a similar feeling of empowerment when I am directly manipulating my materials (especially when construction is involved). In the past, I felt a sense of satisfaction when building my own stretchers. The tactile feeling of manipulating lumber, operating machinery, and having the skills to construct something, were all essential to the making of the painting. Stretching a canvas with my hands and using a large wide brush to paint the first coat of

gesso on the raw canvas was an experience that I looked forward to. It was as if I were preparing the soil for my crop, labouriously preparing the plane from which the painting would emerge.

Figure 16. Jennifer Schuler, *Hidden Labour*, pastel on paper, 2009

Can I acknowledge the labour of making without actually showing it? In *Hidden Labour* (fig. 16), I do not entirely reveal the labour of the work to my viewer. My labour is *present* but not *visible* to the viewer. The work consists of a drawing that I created using high pigment pastel sticks and a sheet of heavy stock watercolour paper. I used these pastels to cover the sheet entirely. This process was simple in its gesture, yet labour intensive at the same time. With the force of my arm and the weight of my hand, I created a

dense and bright colour field. Because my intention with this work was to create an optical sensation, the solid colour field played a necessary role. Also suggested was a laborious process, which relates to the conceptual element behind this work. My intention was to recognize domestic labour that continues to be unacknowledged in our society.

Rather than showing the side that was drawn on, I have turned the work against the wall. By hanging the drawing several centimetres away from the wall, the illusion of a glow is created. Light is bounced off of the pink pigment on the sheet of paper onto the wall. While the drawing (or mark) is not directly visible to the viewer, my objective remains to create a uniform colour field drawing by eliminating the visibility of the mark. I have rubbed each drawing to the point at which the intensity of the pigment is more visible and prominent than the mark of the pastel. By not completely drawing to the edge of the paper, it is impossible for the viewer to see my mark when looking at it from the side. With this presentation, my actions have been completely concealed and it is only in the ephemeral glow where the tone exists. While this work has a minimalist form, its content embodies my interest in how traditional women's domestic labour is extremely important in the function of a home.

As Dolores Hayden first states in her book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, "cooking food, caring for children, and cleaning house, tasks often thought of as 'women's work' to be performed without pay in domestic environments, have always been a major part of the word necessary labour"

(1). Because this labour was (and still is) performed without pay and not as valued as men's labour, it is often described as hidden labour. In her article "Valuing Women's Work in the Home: A Defining Moment," published in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* in 2005, Kim Brooks focuses on how unpaid domestic work, primarily performed by women, is valued within the Canadian legal system, specifically with regards to workers' compensation in the event of an injury. By highlighting a specific Canadian case, which she describes as "a defining moment in legal recognition" (177), Brooks examines how unpaid domestic labour is undervalued. She explains that

> Work in the market sphere [the public workplace] is easily valued, while work in the private sphere often remains unvalued, despite the fact that many of those activities have market prices, even if they are not actually paid in a particular context. The unpaid nature of work in the home has historically created excuses for policy-makers to ignore value of work in the home—work that is predominantly undertaken by women (178). [...] In the area of compensation for loss of housework capacity, women historically have faced discrimination [...] since it is not the subject matter of market transactions, unpaid work in the home has been assumed not to have a value. [This] bias [was] echoed in judicial opinions that either denied injured women compensation for unpaid

> work in the home or undervalued that work when compensation was granted. (186)

Within the specific case that Brooks has highlighted in her article, a "breakthrough" was made with regards to recognizing the type of work women perform in the home: "women perform two types of tasks in the home—direct and indirect labour" (190). Direct labour involving often more physical activities and indirect labour consisting of organizing, planning, mentoring, and tutoring (184). Brooks further explains that

> [...] women who work in the home develop sophisticated skills in at least some of the domestic arts, [such as developing] very special skills in response to their families' needs; for example homemakers may develop particular ways of preparing their families' favourite foods, cleaning and preparing their clothes, or [...] providing tutorial services to their children that reflect their unique needs, cultural backgrounds, and specific directions from school teachers and other mentors. (191)

My intention with *Hidden Labour* is to highlight this problematic understanding that domestic labour is not considered valuable work. The choice to literally "hide" my labour (by turning the drawing around) aims to further amplify its relationship and reference to domestic hidden labour. My labour is integral to the creation of the pink glowing effect of the drawing just as domestic labour is integral to a home.

I argue that domestic labour is not only necessary for the proper function of a house; it also contributes to the creation of a comfortable, warm, and loving living space, which in turn is a home. Having much to do with how the colour pink is composed of warm tones, I use this colour as a means to illustrate, on an atmospheric level, a comfortable "essence" of a home. Brooks asks: "How much does the loss of housekeeping capacity diminish the loss of enjoyment in life?" (189). In my opinion, such a loss would profoundly contribute to the mental and emotion health of the individuals in the home.

This work could also be read as a critique of the history of "male" monochrome and colour field painting in the way that I, as a female artist, have presented it as a minimalist pink colour field. As I mentioned earlier in the section on "Pink and Taste," colour strongly relates to "the patriarchal and masculinist assumptions" of taste, decoration, and culture (Sparke 204). Sparke explains that "taste culture" also named "highbrow culture" (in the 1970s) associated itself with modernism and refused to relate to mass media and popular culture. She writes, "streamline products and plastic artefacts which stood outside the modernist canon, [feminine taste] was generally perceived by highbrow culture as being essentially 'middle-brow' in character" (208). Thus, the assumption can be made that anything relating to "feminine taste," such as the colour pink, was not commonly found within "high culture" or considered as "good taste." While *Hidden Labour* is primarily about labour and process as well as light and the creation of an ephemeral work, by creating a work that uses minimalism and "good taste" as

a form in combination with a laborious "feminine" colour field, this work begins to challenge how colour can be political depending on the context and form. I challenge the institution of "high culture" and "minimalism" by using its form to visualize the necessary labour that has been performed for hundreds of years by women who have never been appreciated as equals (to men) in their patriarchal worlds. To push the work even further, I use the colour pink, which has also been discriminated against within "high culture."

In her essay "Painting with Ambivalence" in the *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* exhibition catalogue, Helen Molesworth examines the relationship between feminist art and abstract expressionism and modernism in the 1960s and 1970s. Molesworth looks at the work of artists Joan Snyder, Howardena Pindell, and Mary Heilmann, all of whom "turned to modernism [...] from both feminism and the early winds of postmodernism" (430). This position attributed to "their own version of modernism" (Molesworth 430). Being a successful artist during the 1960s and 1970s was, for women, extremely difficult. Female painters experienced even more challenges when persisting with mark making because painting is a medium "shackled by centuries of tradition (from patriarchy to patronage)" (Molesworth 429). Associating with feminism contributed to their challenges (Molesworth 430-431). Despite their difficulties, feminist artists continued to paint. Heilmann abandoned her sculptural work when it was not included in the 1969 *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. "Her rebellious act" to embrace "a material-based

sort of conceptual, anti-aesthetic, earth coloured, ironic painting" in turn became her version of Colour Field Painting (Molesworth 433). While studying at Boston University, Pindell noted that her professor, Al Held, would "make fun of the women. He got angry if a woman used certain colours in her work," especially when a women used pink in her work (Molesworth 434). As a result, Pindell "continued to use pink, of course, as did Snyder and Heilmann, sometimes to such an extent that their work feels like a bit of a dare" (Molesworth 434). Snyder's approach to painting was extremely expressive in that her "brush strokes often feel like angry jabs at the canvas, and her flamboyant use of colour has been described as producing paintings (Molesworth 435) "drenched with personal pain, stammered with rage" (Herrera qtd. in Molesworth 435). Pindell, Snyder, and Heilmann have all challenged the institution of "high culture" with their aesthetics. By combining colours of "vulgar, or gendered hues" (Molesworth 439) in combination with the modernist grid, or expressive mark making, these women have reclaimed painting, which, as I mentioned earlier, is a medium "shackled by centuries of tradition," as a tool to express their powerful voices (Molesworth 439). When showing *Hidden Labour*, I may not receive as intense a reaction as these women did during the 1970s and 1980s when they showed their work. Because of such radical gestures that occurred in the feminist art movement, my work is not necessarily shocking. However, because I am combining modernist and minimalist aesthetic with the use of pink, I believe that a degree of tension is still created.

The labour that I perform in the studio is not only important for the work, it also acknowledges my position as a female maker. The gender of the artist is always considered in the work. By intentionally referencing the relationship between my gender and my labour (through the work), I am allowing for a space where the viewer can further consider this relationship. By reclaiming my gender as a maker, I am not allowing the viewer to pigeonhole me as a secondary gender and maker in comparison to men. My desire to speak about concepts of gender, the body, domesticity, and labour is a way for me to reclaim these concepts in the execution of the visual work. The work is my way of vocalizing my position as a feminist, a woman, and an artist so as to reclaim the culturally charged, gendered-coded colour of pink.

Chapter 5: Private Performances and Domestic Rituals

To use one's body and self through performance art, whereby the body and self become the subject of the work challenges the line between what constitutes the subject and the maker. As an artist, I did not always acknowledge my body and its involvement in the act of making. Emerging from the 1970s and 1980s, performance art, also referred to as "actions, events, performances, pieces, things, was largely and often very specifically concerned with the operations of the body" (Carlson 100-102). "Performance" art, and its emergence from a somewhat underground culture and a small artistic community, often referenced the manipulation of physical objects, theatre, dance, conceptual art, the clown, monologue, and stand-up comedy (100). "Body art," a more specific form of "performance art," referenced the artist's body as an integral part of the performance piece. Amelia Jones, in her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, argues that "body art practices [...] exacerbate, perform, and/or negotiate the dislocating effects of social and private experience [...]" (1).

The criticality in using or referencing one's body when making lies often in the sex of the body. When I include my female body in the making, is the process read differently? I would argue that the consideration of gender is amplified when the work itself is about the body of the artist. Perhaps this is because every person performs her body differently. The following questions are of concern for me: What happens when body art includes performances

from daily rituals or "behavioural patterns" (Carlson 102)? How do we consider the sexed body in these rituals?

During the 1970s, artists such as Tom Marioni and Bonnie Sherk incorporated or highlighted everyday gestures in their performance works. These included "walking, sleeping, eating, drinking, [and] cooking, to achieve a heightened awareness of habitual behaviour patterns" (Carlson 102). In 1969, Alison Knowles performed *The Identical Lunch*, which entailed representing "her habit of eating the same food at the same time each day, a tuna fish sandwich on wheat toast, with lettuce, butter, no mayo and a cup of soup or a glass of buttermilk" (Knowles). Since her 1969 *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, Mierle Laderman Ukeles has "brought unseen acts of maintenance into public view as the art itself, turning a mirror onto the hidden tasks on which our lives depends" (Mark 311). In works such as *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside,* Ukeles washed the steps of the main entrance of Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, and the marble floors of its Avery Court. For *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object* (1974), Ukeles, the conservator, and a maintenance worker cleaned the glass display case of an Egyptian mummy (Mark 311). The gender of Ukeles is important in this work because she is performing domestic rituals that have primarily been performed in our society by women. Her interest in maintenance within the institutional museum draws attention to her body as a female artist. Within her projects, Ukeles has made visible the labour we rarely consider, labour that is extremely integral to the order and function of

our lives. Chaos would break loose if maintenance works were stopped for even a short period of time.

What occurs when performance art is incorporated with installation? Am I as the artist part of the physical work? Or am I simply making a spectacle of my process? What if combining performance and installation go hand in hand with one another, neither being able to exist on their own? In 1963, Carolee Schneemann created *Eye Body*, a work that consisted of her nude body within an installation. Schneemann considers her body in this piece as "a visual territory, an integral material, within a dramatic environmental construction of mirrors, painted panels, moving umbrellas and motorized parts. [Her body was] covered in paint, grease, chalk, ropes [and] plastics" (Jones 2). *Eye Body* was performed in the privacy of Schneemann's studio and now exists in photographic form (Blackwood). In keeping with the idea of the private and the intimate in *Eye Body*, Schneemann has chosen to use her body in its true form: the nude. An extremely provocative gesture for its time—especially for female artists—Schneemann conscientiously portrayed her body as an "eroticized" nude (Jones 2). Her intention was "to use my body as an extension of my painting-constructions [...] to challenge and threaten the psychic territorial power lines by which women were admitted to the Arts Stud Club" (Jones 3). What interests me in Schneemann's work is this determination to challenge the art world with the use of her own body. While the female nude has been a prominent subject in the history of art, *Eye Body* uses it in order to empower the artist. Schneemann's powerful position is

defined in this work because of her confidence as an artist and her confidence in her erotic bodily self.

As an outsider looking in on the world of performance art, I have found myself wanting to take part in this form of art that I consider frightening, challenging, provoking, and powerful. My relationship with performance art is different than when working with more object based mediums. What I have come to realize is that I no longer desire to create a final object. The process itself is rewarding enough for me. My objective with performance work is for my viewer to understand this relationship. I want my performative work to sit side-by-side with my other "object" based works and for the former to have the same level of accessibility with my viewer. I have also considered performance art as another way to explore and question my sense of self. My desire to engage in this new practice has come through the collection of materials. *Beloved Linens* (fig. 17) is a work that involves the gathering of pink coloured linens from my neighbourhood's second-hand store. Because I use the material in a way that references its origins (the home), *Beloved Linens* refers to a domestic and private realm.

As my work is progressing, I have begun to look at domestic activities as personal performances because they are performed in the privacy of the home, on a daily basis, and are not intended for a specific audience. I am interested in reading domestic acts as rituals. *Beloved Linens* incorporates a series of domestic actions in combination with the pink linens. After I collect the linens, I wash them in my building, where I normally perform the ritual of

doing laundry. I then travel to the studio by bus and hang them to dry on a conventional pulley operated laundry line. These acts are then repeated every day for seven consecutive days. As a new load of pink linens is hung to dry, a previous load is folded and placed in a nearby laundry basket. At the end of the seven days, the piece exists as a five-foot tall pile of folded linens. The ritual is repeated once I expand my collection of linens.

Figure 17. Jennifer Schuler, *Beloved Linens,* performance/installation, 2009

Women have performed these domestic acts for hundreds of years. During the 1950s in Germany, my grandmother would begin boiling water for the laundry at five in the morning while the entire family was still asleep in bed. She washed and partially dried all of the laundry without electricity, using simple but necessary machinery that most of us today would not even

recognize or have the slightest idea how to use. Now, at eighty-three, she still hangs all of her laundry to dry. Her obsessive need to iron all of her laundry (even her undergarments) is most likely a pattern or standard of working that she has developed over many years. With *Beloved Linens*, I pay tribute to the women in my life, such as my grandmother, who have washed, dried, ironed, folded, and put away thousands of pieces of linens over the course of their lives.

As I have chosen to place this work within the gallery setting, it is important for me that it be seen as an installation as well as a performance. I aim to alter and challenge the traditional viewing experience by introducing smell with this work and therefore the linens are washed with a scented laundry detergent. This, combined with hanging the linens to dry indoors, creates an environment filled with the scent many of us associate today with clean laundry. My objective is to offer the viewer another sensory experience in addition to the visual. Jim Drobnick posits that "the authority of vision" (10) has dominated the "five senses in Western culture since the time of Plato" (10). He further explains that "the sense of smell has been subject to exclusion and dismissal from the realm of the aesthetic" (10). Olfaction, a sensory phenomenon, has not been fully explored within the arts until recently. Not only is smell an intangible and irreproducible phenomena, it is also extremely difficult to describe with the use of a verbal or textual vocabulary (Drobnick 13). Everyone's sense of smell is different. We all draw different meanings from smell, depending on the context, our community "social affinity and

definitions of place, character, mood" (Drobnick 14). The body and "systems of etiquette, dress and hygiene are invariably linked" with our sense of smell (Drobnick 12). Jana Sterbak has played with the taboo of personal hygiene in her work, *Perspiration: Olfactory Portrait* (1995), where she chemically reconstructed her partner's sweat into a "perfume." In order to be activated, it must be rubbed into the oil of one's skin, "thus crossing a new threshold of intimacy" (Drobnick 18).

Smells also have the ability to evoke emotional responses within individuals. Mark Lewis commemorated historical instances of smell's power in his work *An Odour of Disorder* (1992) by "spraying such scents as leather, tobacco, musty books, and gun powder at pivotal sites throughout downtown Montreal" (Drobnick 17-18). As Drobnick explains, "smell functions as a tool [here] to make counter-history acutely present" (18). The power of scent is so significant because it is a sense that we cannot turn off (Drobnick 15). Incorporating scent within my work, I am intrigued by its effect and power. Bachelard writes that "[...] a whiff of perfume or even the slightest odour can create an entire environment in the world of imagination" (174). Drobnick astutely describes the phenomena that occurs with an olfactory artwork and the viewer: "An artwork that must be inhaled, that fills the air with fragrance and envelops the viewer, that seems to seep into one's very pores, breaks the illusion that a viewer exists solely as a scopic viewpoint, that is, without a body, sensations, or feelings" (15). I am interested in this notion of being able to experience a work corporeally. It is through the sensation of smelling that

my objective with this work was to trigger memories of domestic comfort within my viewer.

Most of the performances in this work are done in private. I do not have an audience in my home when I wash the linens. The commute with the linens, from my home to the studio, is done alone. The hanging is done in the studio where my peers may or may not be present. On 11 February 2009, I chose to perform one hanging in front of my fellow MAA peers. This one public performance changed the dynamic of the piece in that I was more aware of my actions and my body. Even though I did not change my actions (from the private performance) in front of my audience, I had the sensation that my gestures where dramatized and heightened. I believe this was partially due to my inexperience in performance work. However, as I became more comfortable, a sense of rhythm was created by my actions. When the performance was done in private, it was more about a meditative series of gestures. In both cases, I was acutely aware of the presence and movement of my body. As Jones writes in the survey text from *The Artist's Body* "[a]s the 'meeting-place' of the individual and the collective, the site where the private and public spheres of the everyday life 'can be traced', the body is mobilized by artists to activate and, in some cases, to erase the division between self, and other, body and space" (26). With this work, I see my body and the way in which I present my body as an extension of my materials. My dress is considered in this work to further reference the normalcy of the actions; I

chose to wear a different piece of my own pink clothing for each day of the work.

Having the opportunity to look back at *Beloved Linens* and take into account some of the feedback I received from my peers, some of my thoughts around this work revolve around where the line is drawn between art performance and everyday gestures. As I previously mentioned, Ukeles has devoted the majority of her practice to what she calls "maintenance artworks." During her piece, *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day*, Ukeles asked three hundred maintenance workers to collaborate with her during this work. In a letter she distributed to all of the workers, she explained her work in the following way:

> I am a maintenance artist. My work is called Maintenance Art Works. I use my "artistic freedom" to call "maintenance"—the work that you do, and the work that I do—"art." Part of the time I do private maintenance at home taking care of my family; and part of the time I do public maintenance in museums and galleries to show people my ideas. (623)

The idea within this statement that struck me the most is that when Ukeles is performing her "maintenance work" at home, caring for her family, she still considers it "art." I am committed to making this connection with my recent work as well. Because of my interest within domestic work, I must include the rituals that I perform within the private realm of my home as part of my

artistic practice. Ukeles made this statement thirty-three years ago. How is this still relevant in 2009? Domestic rituals are activities that continue to be at issue today. Domestic chores are activities that we will always have to face. Despite the fact that the concept of a family, or people sharing a home, is extremely different than thirty years ago (women are no longer expected to perform these activities, different roles are performed by different genders, same sex families, single parent families, single individuals living in a home, or even roommates), domestic rituals still need to be performed by someone. Because I am a woman, talking about this subject does not mean that it is currently "feminine" work. Nevertheless, in the past, it was performed by many women. My desire to examine these activities in my work has to do with recognizing the importance and necessity of this labour. Because domestic labour must be performed within every household in order for it to be safe, clean, and healthy, I would argue that everyone can relate to my work. Ukeles states that "We are, all of us whether we desire it or not, in relation to Sanitation, implicated, dependent—if we want the City, and ourselves, to last more than a few days" (624). Here in Canada, a wealthy country, we as citizens do not focus much of our attention on waste and cleanliness. It is a system that many of us take for granted. However, when an event occurs in which this system is interrupted, we immediately take notice and recognize its importance. In 2007, for instance, the citizens of Vancouver dealt with a civil service strike that resulted in the interruption of the garbage collection service for eighty-eight consecutive days from July to October. In the summer of

2009, Toronto faced a similar strike. Sanitation and cleanliness are standards we expect most people to follow. When the CDC H1N1 flu broke out throughout the world earlier this year, proper hygiene directions began appearing in public washrooms and in public service announcements. My aim with these examples is to illustrate the necessity and relevancy of domestic labour in our society today. It is in my visual work that I intend to further highlight these crucial everyday rituals.

Before creating *Beloved Linens*, I looked to other artists who have incorporated performance in their process of making for inspiration and further understanding of this process of making. Contemporary artist Janine Antoni "transforms the daily rituals of eating, sleeping, washing, and make-up into a sculptural process" (Lajer-Burcharth 42). Antoni is fully aware of her body in all of her works. She has created textile works that incorporate her brain patterns while she dreams into weaving. The body's cerebral subconscious activities are documented in a women's craft based material in her piece *Slumber* (1993). In her series of sculptures, *Lick and Lather* (1993), Antoni created fourteen busts of herself, with seven cast in chocolate and seven cast in soap. The artist bathed with the soap bust to rub away her features so that she is no longer recognizable. The process of washing and scrubbing at her own face is an extremely intimate experience. Even more intimate is when Antoni licks away at the seven chocolate busts so that they to do not resemble her physical self. In her 1992 piece *Loving Care,* Antoni continuously submerged her hair in a bucket of brown hair dye in order to

have a sufficient amount of dye to "paint" the gallery floor in a mopping motion. Her simple yet powerful bodily gestures reference notions of female beauty and the relationship between cleaning routines and the female body. In the essay "Antoni's Difference," Ewa Lajer-Burcharth explains, "by mimicking not only the Abstract Expressionist stroke but also the quotidian cleaning ritual, it [*Loving Care*] refers to the feminine body ensnared by the tradition association of femininity with domestic chores while at the same time alluding to physical realm of obsession" (50).

While my actions in *Beloved Linens* are very simple and repetitive gestures, I believe these actions are integral to the installation (just as Antoni's actions are integral to her sculptures). They highlight an activity that was traditionally considered both women's labour and domestic labour. By performing repetitive gestures and inviting my viewer to watch on a daily basis, I am highlighting the mundane and necessary ritual of washing. Domestic work never ends: the garbage must be taken out, the dishes washed (or placed in the dishwasher), the furniture must be dusted, and the laundry must be done. Through my actions, I am recognizing this labour as valid and crucial even in contemporary times. I am asking my viewer to look more closely at this labour because, as Bachelard says, "to use a magnifying glass is to pay attention, but isn't paying attention already having a magnifying glass? Attention by itself is an enlarging glass" (158). My role as an artist is to place a magnifying glass over elements of our world so as to invite further analysis and discussions. I recognize that hanging laundry to dry is no longer

performed by the majority of our population; nonetheless, I chose these actions because of their simple and repetitive gestures. Placing the magnifying glass over myself, I have become aware that my body as a maker has always influenced my material practice.

Conclusion

By including the analysis of the self in this work, I have not only begun to question but also understand how I operate as a maker. My time at Emily Carr University has led me to a space of deeper critical thinking. My thesis work has pushed my ideas of being a feminist artist through my examination of colour. I now question my gendered body within my practice and how it impacts the making and reading of the work. I did not consider this a significant part of my practice before. Not only has my thinking changed, my materials have changed as well. I have broken free of my painting-based practice and am now more inspired by practices in performance and installation.

Where has this journey led? Pink has allowed me to explore many avenues of inquiry that have helped me to understand myself as a gendered visual artist. My objective is to continue to move forward with my pink body of work with a focus on domestic labour as necessary and valid. I am currently working on a series that incorporates found text to further illustrate domestic labour. My intention is to continue working on *Beloved Linens* and *Traces of Labour* since I consider them to be ongoing projects. My intent is to propose *Beloved Linens* for future exhibitions as a means to continue the necessary labour of washing and hanging linens. I would like to continue blurring the line between my artistic practice and personal life by pursuing more performance-based projects. The evolution of this project and the development of my practice have led me to a point where I now am engaging in a more

political and critical discourse within my practice as a visual artist. When I began this journey, I could not imagine the colour pink would lead me to where I am at this present moment.

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